

Staff Summary

The Early Learning Council met from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm on September 28, 2005. The day included: 1) follow-up on the exercise from the August 16 meeting about “what would success look like;” 2) presentations and discussion about partnership and governance; and 3) facilitated small group discussions with Council members and the audience about vision, mission and goals; governance; quality rating and tiered reimbursement; and public engagement.

The morning presentations included:

- ***An Opportunity for Partnership: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Early Learning Investment Approach for Washington State – Bill Gates, Sr., Greg Shaw, Valisa Smith, Katie Hong*** – This presentation included a description of the public-private partnership proposed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Included were their reasons for investing in early learning and an overview of their proposed advocacy grants and creation of coordinated networks of quality early learning in demonstration communities in Washington State. They are asking that the state partner with them in the demonstration communities.
- ****Kids Matter: Improving Outcomes for Children in Washington State – Lorrie Grevstad and Sangree Froelicher*** - This presentation described a strategic framework for building the early childhood system that identifies achievable outcomes in health care, mental health, early learning, and parenting support.
- ****Organization of Early Learning, Care and After-school Programs – The Collaborative, League of Education Voters, and the Early Care and Education Coalition Committees*** – Representatives from these groups encouraged Council members to review their paper.
- ****Approaches to Early Learning Governance: An Overview – Karen Tvedt*** – Brief summary of why early learning governance matters and alternative approaches to the administration of early learning programs.

*These papers are posted on the Washington Learns website.

Summary of Small Group Work from Flip Charts and Reports to the Council

Early Learning Vision and Goals

Vision: To create a sustainable, integrated and accessible early learning system that provides parents, families, caregivers and communities in Washington State with the information, support and services they need to ensure that every child is prepared from birth to succeed in school and life.

Goals:

- All children are ready for school and schools are ready for children
- Parents have choices from a menu of comprehensive services
- Early learning teachers have the training and support they need to help children be school ready
- Appropriate public and private finance, support and engagement exists
- Quality early learning is supported by the public and the market place
- The system recognizes that success may be defined differently across communities and promotes inclusion and support to each child and family's culture
- Coordination and collaboration is improved across systems
- The quality rating system results in positive outcomes for families, providers and communities
- The new early learning governance structure is accountable for measurable results (outcomes are measured for children/families, organizations, and the system)

Governance

In the two small groups that considered early learning governance, the majority opinion was that a separate cabinet-level department of early learning is the preferred approach to providing increased visibility, priority and independence for early learning and improved early learning outcomes for young children. Some participants raised concerns about the potential for harder boundaries between early learning and K-12 and difficulties in determining whether aspects of family support, education and health should be included in the new agency (and the possibility that new types of fragmentation would emerge).

There was majority support for:

- A cabinet level department of early learning headed by an administrator appointed by the Governor;
- The creation of an associated structure or entity that is focused on building public-private partnerships to support the development of a high quality early learning system;
- Ongoing coordination with K-12 and Higher Education, family services, health services, tribes and others through a statewide coordination mechanism;
- Improved coordination across early learning services at the local community level to increase involvement, improve efficiency and quality, and make it easier for families (and providers) to access the supports they need;
- Attention to transitions between early learning and K-12;
- That the following services should be included in the new department: child care subsidies; quality activities; resource and referral services; ECEAP; the Head Start-State Collaboration Office; and licensing (although some separation may be needed to ensure that enforcement

is not done by the same staff who provide mentoring and technical assistance; issues were also raised about the lack of regulations for part-day preschools and private kindergartens).

Additional consideration needs to be given to the pluses and minuses of including the following: family support, e.g., home visiting, parenting resources; health, e.g., First Steps, Healthy Child Care Washington; Special Education Preschools; the Infant and Toddler Early Intervention Program; food and nutrition program; Even Start; and Title 1.

Quality Rating System and Tiered Reimbursement

Background: A quality rating system (QRS) linked to tiered reimbursement provides clear steps, supports and incentives for early learning providers to increase the quality of services they provide. The ratings programs receive can be used to provide parents with information about the type and quality of early learning programs in their communities—implementation of QRS is generally associated with a public outreach strategy to make parents and the public aware of the system.

QRS goals suggested during the 9/28 ELC meeting included:

- Children successful
- Parents empowered with concrete information needed to make good decisions about early learning programs
- Increased community awareness about quality care
- Enhanced working relationships among providers, parents and children
- Providers have access to mentors and support
- System is easily understood by providers, parents, and facilitators
- Quality Rating and Improvement System--improved quality of care for children parents empowered with information; providers assisted in improving the quality of care they offer

The ELC Technical Advisory Group (TAC) on Quality Rating and Tiered Reimbursement proposes:

- Five steps starting with licensing and accreditation (or perhaps comprehensive services such as Head Start or ECEAP) as the fifth level;
- Separate tracks for homes, centers, and school-age care settings—recognizing the difference between running a family home business versus classrooms—but with expected outcomes for children being the same;
- Availability of supports for providers to help them move from one level to the next—to ensure that providers serving our most vulnerable children in low-income communities are included; and
- Providers who have achieved higher levels of quality receive increased payments for services provided to subsidized children and families (tiered reimbursement).

The TAC has sub-groups working on program elements that will likely comprise the proposed system including: curriculum and learning environment; professional development, qualifications and compensation; program assessment, licensing and accreditation; and family and community partnerships.

During the 9/28 Early Learning Council meeting, small groups responded to questions raised by the TAC: Participants supported licensing as the first QRS step as well as a separate track for family homes. The group endorsed step five (on a five point scale) as representing best practice, but wanted to make sure providers have support for moving up the scale. Participants also wanted compensation and other incentives to be associated with provider participation and improved quality. Questions were raised about including preschools as well as other non-licensed caregivers in QRS.

Public Engagement and Outreach

Small groups addressed the following questions: What is the message? Who are our audiences? How do we build credibility with stakeholders and key decision makers? What are our dissemination strategies? The following is a synthesis:

- A **paradigm shift** is needed that facilitates information flow from and to diverse communities (dialogue/feedback loop); focus on inclusion and consensus building;
- The message needs to **reach a variety of audiences** and build on existing communities and expertise across socio-economic, ethnic, faith-based, and special needs groups as well as voters, funders, policy makers, educators, law enforcement, providers, parents, business, and the media;
- The **message** should be well-honed and resonate with multiple audiences in multiple languages (we all have a stake in early learning; return on investment; start behind, stay behind; state competitiveness; revisit brain development work; compensation, support and reward for high quality care); focus and prioritize;
- **Credibility** will be built by using local representatives; developing relationships that are authentic; equitable leadership; positively conveying what high quality early learning services are; benchmarks; diverse champions; messages framed in a factual way that is clear, concise, consistent and memorable; test messages; get buy-in from K-12 and Higher Education; accountability and evaluation;
- **Dissemination** strategies include: partnerships; grassroots networking; the media; resource and referral network; faith communities (meet people where they pray); paid campaign with a long-term memorable message; involve Born Learning; multi-pronged message for diverse audiences; simple message for trusted messengers (community leaders and elders, health representatives); bubble-up local expertise; tap into existing community groups; engage everyday contacts; child profile mailing list; going to associations and other meetings; surveying; using hospitals and birth centers, libraries, grocery stores and other sites.

After final reports from small groups, Bob Watt adjourned the meeting at 3:30 pm.